

REMARKS

A Request for a One (1) Month Extension of Time pursuant to 37 CFR §1.136(a) and (b) is attached hereto.

The above-captioned patent application has been carefully reviewed in light of the non-final Office Action to which this Amendment is responsive. Claims 1, 4, 13 and 14 have been amended in an effort to clarify and particularly point out the present invention and to correct minor typographical errata. To that end, it is believed no new matter has been added.

Claims 1-4, 6-10, 13 and 14 stand as pending in the above-captioned application. Claims 5, 11, 12 and 15-18 have been withdrawn from consideration based upon a previous Restriction Requirement. If a generic claim is deemed allowable, then the Restriction Requirement would be withdrawn and the non-elected claims would be considered. Otherwise, Applicant reserves the right to file divisional applications based on the subject matter of the non-elected claims.

Pending Claims 1-4, 6-10 and 13-14 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Haar (U.S. Patent No. 5,400,652) in view of Makeev et al. (U.S. Patent No. 3,830,121). Claim 13 has also been rejected under 35 U.S.C. §112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which Applicant regards as the invention. Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration based on the amended claims, as well as the following comments.

In order to successfully advance a "*prima facie*" obviousness rejection under the Patent Statute, each and every essentially claimed limitation must be found in or suggested by the cited art, whether singly or in combination. Those limitations that are neither found in or suggested by the cited art must be notoriously well known to one of sufficient (i.e., ordinary) skill in the field of the invention. In the case of combining references, there must be a reason found somewhere in the prior art as a whole in order to make the purported combination at the time of the invention. The combination should not be made as a result of impermissible hindsight; that is, advance knowledge of the claimed invention.

The present application refers to a method for operating a panel placement system, and for feeding panels through a punching press. As outlined in the Background portion of the above-captioned application, there are a number of problems that are associated in the stepwise feeding of a panel through a punching press while at the same time being able to maintain high precision and speed. Acceleration and deceleration forces create effects on the means holding each fed plate, as well as the plate itself. For example, these forces may lead to a undesired deformation of the planar panels through undulating motions caused in part by the gripping means as applied to the feed slide of the press. To that end, the punching press will only run as fast as is allowed by the feeding motion.

As noted in the Background portion and prior to the present invention, known panel feeding systems engage the panels by means of prongs or gripping pliers, while either engaging a plate at the rear or the lateral edges thereof. The foregoing systems and methods of use do not facilitate advancement of panels. According to the presently claimed invention, however, first connection means are provided that engage the panel adjacent to the rear edge at surface portions between the edge and the surfaces to be punched out. Moreover, the surfaces of the panel that are engaged are exclusively engaged from above by the first connection means. This engagement can occur by means of producing a vacuum or electromagnetically or by other forces in seizing a panel in the manner and location described. In accordance with one aspect of the herein described method, the first connection means can include pin-like spikes, formed, for example within suction ports, that can be used to penetrate the panels exclusively from above – see for example, page 4, first –third paragraphs. Such penetration and seizing can occur over the entire width of the panel in the rear edge area thereof.

Advantageously, the inventive method uses areas of the fed panel that are not punched out, for the first connection means, in order to seize and then shift the panel from the transfer position to the final position of a punching operation. The herein described method permits better guidance, especially with larger, thinner panels wherein forces producing undulatory motions as produced by other connection means and known placement systems are avoided. As a direct result, larger accelerations and higher performances are achievable.

Moreover, the time to pick up and take over a panel is significantly shortened wherein operation of a punching press is permitted without idle strokes and without reducing revolutions of the press. The positioning of the first positioning means also permits a final punching cut to be made such that a "fresh" panel can be pushed into the system by means of a feed slide underneath without issue.

In addition, engagement of the panels over broad surfaces adjacent to the rear edge has a significant advantage that the panel is not subject to large deformations, as is the case when the panel is gripped by prongs, such as described, for example, by the cited art of Haar.

Turning to the cited art, Haar (U.S. Patent No. 5,400,652) teaches the gripping of the panels by means of prongs or gripping pliers. This reference is typical of known panel placement systems as noted in the Background portion of the above-captioned application in which the feed slide includes gripping pliers 26, 28 that engage the plate at the transfer position, see Fig. 1 and in which the pliers engage the plates at the side edges of the plate on opposite sides thereof. Therefore, this reference at least taken alone cannot form a bar to patentability.

The remaining cited reference, Makeev et al. (U.S. Patent No. 3,830,121) relates to apparatus for cutting rolled metal sheets and does not deal with a feeding system which is designed to feed panels through a punching press. This secondary reference discloses a system to engage metal sheets from a pile on a table wherein a gripping device is used in conjunction with a guillotine-like device used to cut the sheets. The Examiner has noted that it would have been obvious to a person of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the invention to replace the gripping means 26, 28 with the gripping suction means of Makeev et al. Applicant disagrees in that the present invention specifies that the rear edge area of the panel is seized by the first connection means. Makeev et al. discloses lifting the entire panel while Haar describes lifting the side areas of the panel. No description is provided in which those rear area surfaces that are not punched are those that are engaged by the first connection means, according to Claim 1. As a result, even if such a combination were arguably possible as posited by the Examiner, absent hindsight of the invention, essential recited features are still missing and therefore a prima facie obviousness rejection cannot be made.

Thus, neither Makeev et al. or Haar provide any teaching of a feeding system having means that engage panels at rear surface portions of a panel only from above between the rear edge and the surfaces to be punched out. For the foregoing reasons, whether taken alone or in combination, neither of Haar and/or Makeev et al. leads to the feature combination according to Claim 1 in that essential features are not found in either reference. Therefore, Claims 2-4, 6-10 and 13, 14 are also believed to be allowable for the same reasons since these claims depend from Claim 1. Claim 1 and Claim 4 have been amended to correct minor typographical errata and to further specify a "first" panel being fed for purposes of Claim 1 to provide more clarity. It is believed no new matter has been added. Therefore and based on the foregoing, reconsideration is respectfully requested.

As to the Section 112 rejection of Claim 13, Applicant has amended each of Claims 13 and 14 to specify the connection means being recited and to clarify and particularly point out that the claimed subject matter. No new matter has been added. Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

In summary and in view of the above amendment, Applicant believes the above-captioned application is now in a condition for allowance and an expedited Notice of Allowability is earnestly solicited.

If the Examiner wishes to expedite disposition of the above-captioned patent application, he is invited to contact Applicant's representative at the telephone number listed below.

Payment of a One (1) Month Extension of Time fee will be made by credit card at the time of filing this response. However, in the event that any additional fees are required, the Director is hereby authorized to charge Deposit Account No. 50-3010 for any additional fees and to charge any overpayments thereto.

Respectfully submitted,

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